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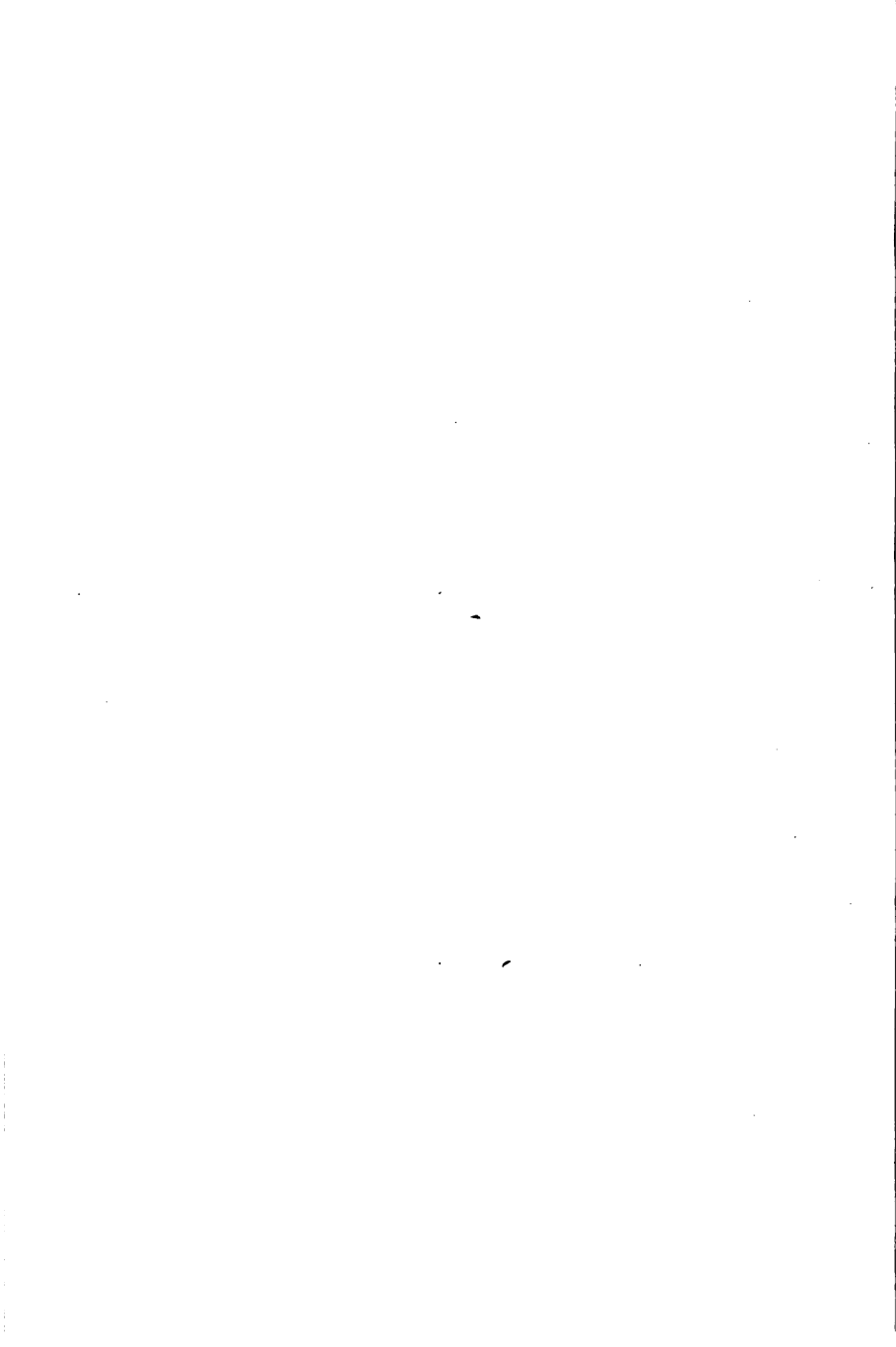
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E. B. Thomas

Friends of the Master



Friends of the Master

By the

Right Rev.

Arthur F. ^{by} Winnington-Ingram, D.D. 1858 -
Bishop of London

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Preface

THIS little volume consists of six sermons preached in West End churches during Lent 1897, and is meant to form a sequel to "The Men who Crucify CHRIST," preached to the same congregations in Lent 1896. The sermons were preached extempore, but have been reproduced as accurately as possible from notes previously made.

A. F. W. INGRAM.

OXFORD HOUSE, BETHNAL GREEN,

June 1897

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Friends of the Master

I

INTRODUCTORY

"Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends."—ST. JOHN XV. 14, 15.

I HAVE chosen for the subject of our meditation this Lent "Friends of the Master," but the title instantly raises a question in our minds which must be settled on this first evening before we go any further. Can CHRIST have friends? Is there not something irreverent in the title? Is He not lifted so absolutely above us as to make all talk of friendship impossible? And the question brings us face to face with the whole difficulty of the conditions of our LORD's human life on earth.

(I.) Was He a real man, as well as God? Had He a man's heart—not only a man's sym-

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pathy, but a man's need of sympathy; did He have friendship and value it, and return it as we do?

(2.) If He had it then, does He have it now? Granted that the early disciples could be His friends, can His disciples be His friends to-day?

(3.) If so, what difference does it make to our religious life to-day? What has it to say to the way we are to keep Lent in 1897?

Let us take these questions in order.

I. Was CHRIST a real man?

And there can be no doubt at all that while the Church, as a Church, has stoutly maintained it, yet members of the Church have been inclined habitually to underrate the reality of our LORD's human life on earth. It is not merely that there have been many more heresies denying that our LORD was really man than there have been denying that He was GOD, but in the Church itself, largely from fear of irreverence, of seeming to deny the other side, men have shrunk from fully admitting all that is implied by His being really man.

Look at three points only.

(a) His real growth in wisdom. In spite of our being told that "He increased in wisdom as

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well as in stature," yet how often has the touching picture of the keen intelligent Child asking questions in the Temple been distorted into the almost repulsive picture of His sitting in the midst of the doctors and teaching them?

How keen we have often been to explain away all the Bible language which speaks of Him as acquiring knowledge by His use of human faculties¹—"coming to know this," "asking this," "looking round in the press"—how unreal it all is if it was only a kind of drama He was acting!

(*b*). And so again with the Temptation. I feel sure that many in their heart of hearts scarcely believe that He was really tempted. They acquiesce in the statement that "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," but they feel little comfort in their own temptations from thinking of His; and yet the whole thing is absolutely unreal if these temptations did not involve a real struggle. It was a real struggle not to use His supernatural resources to satisfy His bodily hunger; a real struggle not to take the quick and sensational way of making an impression on His nation

¹ Cf. Canon Mason's "The Conditions of our LORD's Life on Earth."

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instead of the slow and painful way; a real struggle to one whose infinite longing was to win the souls of the world, not to take the empire over them at any price. But make Him a real man and you have a fight going on before your eyes which should hearten the most depressed man or woman here in their most besetting temptation: putting Himself on our level, fighting the battle with the same arms with which we have to fight, the power of prayer and the grace of the HOLY SPIRIT, He leads us in the fray, and inasmuch as He suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.

(c) And so again consider His need of sympathy. Few things are more touching in the Gospels than our LORD JESUS CHRIST coming back time after time to His human friends and finding them asleep: He was in His worst distress, He was amazed, overwhelmed, "sorrowful even unto death." He wanted His friends: "Couldst thou not watch with Me one hour?" He, the Leader, the Comforter, the Sustainer, wanted comfort Himself; but He could not find it, His friends failed Him, and He had to fight it out alone.

Surely there is only one possible answer to

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our first question. CHRIST was a real man as well as God; it is a really human life we are watching: He was a real boy, a real young working-man, a real son to His mother, a real friend to His friends. It is no fictitious drama of pretended struggle and pretended temptation which He played, but a life and death struggle from the beginning to the end; and so far from not valuing the sympathy of His friends, His great commendation of them was, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations." "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends."

II. Secondly, then is He the same to-day?

And in answer we hear the dear saying which has cheered thousands down the ages through weeks of suffering and years of temptation, "JESUS CHRIST, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

It is true He is no longer weary, as when He sat by the well, or lay tired in the boat; it is true that no cruel nails can tear that Flesh again, nor spear pierce His side; but for all that He is still "the Man JESUS CHRIST," still human-hearted, still knowing what is in man, and "still remembering in the skies His tears, His agonies, and cries."

Does He desire human friends now? Does

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He look now for sympathy, co-operation, and help from men and women?

I believe, fellow-Christians, that we sink far below our vocation if we do not aspire to be friends of JESUS CHRIST; I believe that He loves to draw us as near as possible into His confidence, and longs to say of His disciples to-day, as of His disciples of old, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends."

(a) Take first His work in our own souls.

He wants us to enter into what He is doing. It is the easiest thing in the world to take a captious, untrained, childish view of His work in us. A child rebels at punishment, at discipline, at training, and quite naturally—it cannot be expected to enter into the ulterior object of its training in strength of character and purity of motive; but a friend we expect to understand us when we point out what is wrong in him, or take him into our confidence about our troubles.

So it is with CHRIST: He would like to treat us as friends if we will let Him; but if we resent the slightest discipline, if we childishly complain when sudden sickness or trial comes, if we refuse

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to use the means of grace He plainly points out, how can He treat us so? The slave knoweth not what his LORD doeth, and if we prefer to be slaves He cannot treat us as friends.

But is it not worth while to try and discern what He is doing—to drink the cup, however bitter, if it is for our good; and above all to do with unquestioning obedience the things that He commands, for “Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you”?

(b) And so, again, He would like to make us friends in His plans for the advance of His kingdom. One knows the difference on earth between talking to a sympathetic listener about some Christian work, and talking to some one whom it obviously bores. From a talk with the one you rise refreshed, stimulated, with a new belief in the work. He knows what you are doing; it is his work too; he would be with you if he could, and wishes you well from the bottom of his heart. From the other you rise depressed, blunted, chilled: he does not care, he has his own interests, but they have nothing to do with the advance of the Kingdom of God.

So it is with CHRIST. He looks for friends—we cannot doubt it; He looks for sympathisers

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in the thing dear to His heart, which is to see the great kingdom of righteousness, justice, and grace spread throughout the world. Does He find a friend in you, or does He turn away disappointed? Does He find that the attention has soon wandered, that religion is affected as a respectable thing, but the heart given to something quite different? Are you rather bored than otherwise about missions, whether at home or abroad? If so, can CHRIST count you as His friend?

(c) Once again, CHRIST has to-day as profound a pity for suffering as He ever had. We cannot picture Him as different from what He was, in this at any rate, if we try: it was His distinguishing characteristic on earth; it is, we feel certain, His distinguishing characteristic in heaven. He had compassion on the multitude then; He has compassion on them now. He says again to-day as He said of old, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me."

In other words, the hands that tend the sick tend CHRIST; the willing feet that go on errands of love work for CHRIST; the words of comfort to the sorrowful and of sympathy to the mourner are spoken in the name of CHRIST—CHRIST comforts the world through His friends.

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How much have you done for Him? What sort of a friend have you been to Him? It is useless to sigh over the suffering of the world, and to talk about the hardness of GOD or the callousness of CHRIST when we look at it. GOD is working through His people; CHRIST is succouring through His friends—it is the vacancies in the ranks of His friends wherein the mischief lies: come and fill one gap.

III. What, then, has all this to say to the aim we are to set before us in keeping Lent?

We are to aim at growing more into sympathy with JESUS CHRIST.

And notice what that means. The object of Lent is not to work ourselves up into an unreal passion of sentimental pity, as if He were again suffering, again fasting, again being scourged and crucified; but in the light of the eternal fact, which is as real to-day as ever, that the SON of GOD once did as a real man fast, suffer, and die, we are to try and enter into the mind of CHRIST on different points.

(a) What does He think of sin? He hates it, He loathes it as something horrible, unnatural, offensive to GOD; and yet how familiar we get with it, by what soft names we call it: let us try to gain our Great Friend's point of view of sin.

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Surely we have only to look at the suffering it cost Him, the agony in Gethsemane caused by something much more than the mere dread of death, the desolation of the cry from the Cross, and remember that it was nothing more or less than our own lust and pride and greed and selfishness which caused it all, and we shall catch a greater sense of how hateful the sins really are which have become, alas! so natural to us.

This, then, is our first prayer to the HOLY SPIRIT, who conducts Lent as a kind of great annual Retreat—"Convict us of sin," that we may gain the "mind of CHRIST."

(b) So, again, secondly, we must try to gain our Friend's passion for holiness. We want to be good in a way, probably all of us—but is it a hunger and thirst after righteousness? If we had the choice of being very rich or very holy, which should we really choose?

Now no one would have any doubt as to which CHRIST would have chosen. He might have been very rich, and He chose to be very poor: "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor."

Let us then this Lent deliberately aim at becoming holier. I often think that people make mistakes in their preparation for Communion in thinking

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solely over their sins, whereas preparation is equally preparing our prayer—"What is it we want?" "What is the positive thing we need next?" "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee" is the question addressed to us by GOD. Let us know each morning what we come for, as the blind man did: "LORD, that I may receive my sight." Let us think of some special graces in our Great Friend which we desire to attain this Lent—His patience, His courage, His sincerity—and ask for each one by one at our Communions.

Lastly, let us aim at true sympathy with JESUS CHRIST by sharing His Cross. We shall be studying each week together the characters of CHRIST's different friends of old, seeing how this one shared the long journeys up and down Palestine, and lay with his head on His Breast at the Last Supper, and that one poured out the precious ointment and anointed Him for His burial; how another was loyal in spite of the weakness which led to a temporary denial, another faithful to Him out of devotion for the great debt she owed Him, and yet another who was faithful through the mists of doubt—all in their way sympathising in the Passion and sharing His Cross.

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Let us, too, show that we are not ashamed to follow a crucified Saviour. Who are we to live a full life, unmortified, undisciplined, when our Friend was crucified? Who are we to rebel at poverty, or suffering, or disappointment, when He chose it as His lot? Who are we to make the test of life, "What should I like?" when He persistently made the test of His, "What is God's will?"

If, then, with some such aims as these, we start on our Lenten task, laying aside for six weeks, not our business, for that is impossible, but many of the pleasures and engagements which become the business of some; if we seek in some such spirit, instead of increasing the circle of our acquaintance, to win the one Friendship which ennobles life and lifts it on to another plane altogether, the one Friendship which is open to laymen as it is to clergymen, to women as it is to men—then Lent will be happy to us: the HOLY SPIRIT will most certainly bless our efforts, CHRIST will respond to our longing to know Him better, and we shall be able to give hereafter, as the secret of a stronger, better, purer life, the explanation which Charles Kingsley is reported to have given as the secret of his life, "I had a Friend."

II

ST. JOHN

"That disciple whom JESUS loved."—ST. JOHN xxi. 7.

WE saw last time how true it was that CHRIST was a man as well as GOD; we saw that He was "the Man CHRIST JESUS still," and that the great offer He makes this Lent is to admit us more closely to His friendship: "henceforth" He desires to be able to say of us, "I call you not servants, but . . . friends."

We pass on now to consider in detail some of the friends of CHRIST, and see if we can gather what are the qualities He loves in His friends, if so be we can attain to them ourselves; and there can be little doubt with which friend we must begin. Amid the closest circle there was one, the nearest and dearest of them all; there was one who was not only admitted with two others to scenes which none but they might see, but to such familiar intimacy that he lay

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with his head upon JESUS' breast at the Last Supper, and received that title which, if we come to think of it, is the highest testimonial man can receive on earth, "the disciple whom JESUS loved."

We think, then, of St. John the Evangelist to-day. Why did CHRIST love him? Why did He trust him so completely as to give with a look His mother to his charge? Happy men and women shall we be if we can find the secret, for it is no true disciple who would not exchange any earthly prize or worldly distinction for the glorious honour of being a disciple whom JESUS loves.

I. And first we must guard against a common error. It is often supposed that John was a soft and rather womanish character—I say womanish, because, although all would agree that a womanly woman is one of the most precious things on earth, yet they would also agree that a womanish man is one of the most contemptible; and we slip into the idea that John's was a rather soft and clinging character, and we argue half unconsciously from this, that the characters CHRIST loves best now are the soft and the gentle ones. Even at Ober-Ammergau, where the touching

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representation is so true and so helpful, the St. John is not conceived in bold enough outline, and Mr. Keble would mislead us if we take as the sole Christian ideal—

“Voices low and gentle,
And timid glances shy,
That seem for aid parental
To sue all wistfully ;
Still hoping, longing to be right,
Yet fearing to be wrong—
In these the pastor takes delight,
A lamblike, Christlike throng.”

It is quite true, absolutely true, that He does take delight in them : He loves the lambs of His flock, He carries them in His arms ; He never breaks the bruised reed or quenches the smoking flax ; but we must not forget that His friend was a Son of Thunder—the disciple whom JESUS loved was as brave as a lion and as true as steel ; he was quiet, and modest, and self-effacing, but it was the quiet of the morning when the sun is rising with a force which nothing can resist ; it was the stillness of a great flood which, “ moving, seems asleep ” ; it was the self-suppression of a man who has had to hold down the thunder of an impetuous nature until he can hear and re-echo the still small voice of GOD.

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We must not, then, be led away by our ignorance, now quite inexcusable, of Eastern customs. Each guest reclining at any feast would have his head on a level with the breast of the guest next him, and the touching intimacy of St. John with Jesus, which allowed him to rest his head upon our LORD's breast instead of on his own hand, must not lead us to imagine that there was anything that was not strong, and manly, and true in the affection of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Strength of character—that comes out, then, as the first necessity in CHRIST's friends—not strength of body. I have seen giants of six feet who for all moral purposes were as weak as babies, and women of weak and feeble strength as strong and brave as lions; not strong-mindedness—the strong-minded person is not necessarily attractive, winning, or Christlike—but moral strength, the strength that kept St. John unmoved by the glamour of the world which ruined Judas; that held him in the midst of the hurry and dismay of the trial scene from the fear of ridicule which made St. Peter fall; that steadied him and nerved him at the Cross—it was that on which CHRIST felt He could rest as on a sure foundation. He would not commit Himself to many, for He

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knew what was in man; but He could commit Himself to this man, He could pour out His confidence, He could trust him with His life, nay, more, He could trust him with His mother—"Son, behold thy mother." It needed nothing more, and she passed into the keeping of the first great friend of CHRIST, the disciple whom JESUS loved.

Are we strong—we who aspire to be the friends of CHRIST?

What a humiliating question it is! Is it not true to say that the weakness of Christians is the greatest obstacle to the advance of CHRIST'S Church to-day?

(a) Think of the weakness of will in resisting temptation, the resolutions made at a time like Lent or on a sick-bed, and then given up when the sickness or the season has passed! A very experienced clergyman once said that nine out of ten whom he had known influenced during their sickness threw over their resolutions when they got back into the world. Are we weak or strong in resisting temptation? If we are simply yielding without a struggle, can we claim to be CHRIST'S friends?

(b) Or, again, think of the weakness in society

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in standing up for the colours of the regiment under which we pretend to fight. Are some here afraid to come out and be confirmed for fear of committing themselves, or afraid of being outspoken in a drawing-room, lest they be thought to be setting up as saints? A great missionary was once asked to preach his last sermon; he simply stood in the pulpit and said, "Commit yourselves, commit yourselves, commit yourselves." Can CHRIST commit Himself to us if we will not commit ourselves to His cause?

(c) Or think of the weakness of going by the fashion in everything, the drifting with the tide, being sceptical when it is the thing to be sceptical, taking up Buddhism when it is the clever thing to do; not letting our conscience rule our habits in society, but the customs of society rule our conscience. Think of the tricks of the trade, bad traditions in business, society lies, to which too many of us weakly bow, as if there were no Christian law which had anything to say to them, and no CHRIST whose friendship we should forfeit if we yielded to them. What would St. John have done? There can be only one answer—he would have done to-day what he did of old,

St. John

he would have stood by the Cross for CHRIST against the world.

II. But, then, secondly—there is something which must go by the side of this—mere strength is not enough; we know the man who rather prides himself on being a plain man who speaks his mind; we know the woman who hides her real pleasure in repeating an uncharitable story by assuming the part of the “candid friend.” Can we imagine St. John in the rôle of the modern “candid friend”?

No, surely we discriminate something which goes side by side with his strength, which is indeed part of his strength, and which is the second attribute of the disciple whom JESUS loved—and that is, the most tender, the most gracious charity.

“Little children, love one another,” he is said to have repeated when too ill and too old to do more than be carried into church; “little children, love one another”—it was the secret of St. John’s life long before he said it.

It was this tenderness of touch, this delicacy of feeling which fitted him to tread the sacred courts of that holy Friendship; it was this which made JESUS feel so safe in saying, “Behold thy

St. John

mother." Think of the trial to any man's character to have travelled up and down the country, to have stayed at rough inns, to have shared simple repasts with JESUS CHRIST Himself, to have been able to say, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life"—and yet to have come out of it, approved, tested, looked down upon with love, allowed to recline upon His breast, "the disciple whom JESUS loved."

How should we stand this test of considerateness?

(a) How about our servants? What sort of story would they tell? Would they never have to say that the mistress, so popular, so gracious, so winning in society, was a very different person behind the scenes—exactng, selfish, irritable, vain, hard to please?

(b) Or those who serve in shops. I was reading an article on the drapery trade by a manager, in the *Economic Review*. To say nothing of the long hours, the unnecessary standing which a strong protest from customers might get altered, how many, if the writer is correct, lose their

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situations from the careless inconsiderateness of those who waste time in a shop and go away and never make a purchase! To the customer it is nothing, but to the shop girl, so the writer says, to fail to make a sale three times running means dismissal.

(c) Or impatience at being kept waiting.

Dear friends, there is no pleasure in finding fault—and we are all naturally impatient—but if it is true that the Eternal SON of GOD laid aside His glory, and came in the form of a servant, and washed the feet, even of Judas, He will expect His friends to be a great deal more considerate than they often are.

III. And St. John's third attribute was surely personal love of JESUS Himself.

I have already referred to Ober-Ammergau, but there is one thing about the representation of St. John no one will forget, and that is the way in which he follows our LORD with his eyes.

We may think it so much easier for St. John than for ourselves to have a personal love for CHRIST, but we must remember that (1.) we have the enormous evidence derived from subsequent history—we know by sight what they had to know by faith; (2) we have the Gospels: for

St. John

what object were those Gospels preserved except that JESUS might live and move before our eyes? (3.) we have prayer and the Sacraments: for what object were prayer and the Sacraments instituted, except that we might hold real communion with the same living LORD? No! the true disciple will still be aiming at a personal love of CHRIST, and the disciple whom JESUS loves must at least be trying, by reading the record of the life, by studying the *Gesta Christi* in history, by meditating on His Character, by steadfast and regular Communions, himself to love JESUS.

But while we dwell thus on the qualities in St. John which made "JESUS, beholding him, love him," we must not speak as if St. John was always a perfect character. One of the most touching and instructive things of all is to note how JESUS does not hesitate to rebuke His friend, and try his faith, and give him, in spite of His love, nay! because of His love for him, a long and painful time of trial.

St. John was not alway the quiet and self-controlled and gentle character. A village will not receive our LORD, St. John is all for calling down fire from heaven; a man is casting out

St. John

devils, but he is not "one of us," St. John impetuously forbids him, and receives an open rebuke from JESUS, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My Name that can lightly speak evil of Me."

Does it not give us a glorious hope that CHRIST will take trouble with His friends now?

You have, you say, a harsh temper; you have been indulged and spoilt from a boy or a girl; yes, but CHRIST can tame it for you: He can if you will let Him. If you call it a family temper and think it is no harm, then He can do nothing; but if you admit it is wrong and will give Him a chance, if you will keep with Him, be with Him as St. John was, then He can change you. "To be with our friend," Aristotle tells us, "is of the essence of friendship." To be with Him in thought, in prayer, in Sacrament—that is the way to catch our Great Friend's character: it will soften down the harshness; it will sweeten the bitterness.

It may be that now your home is a perfect hell on earth, and it is your temper that makes

St. John

it so. You may think it is the fault of some one else, but it is really your own. Be with your Friend this Lent—let the great influence that changed St. John change you, and they will take knowledge of you in your home at Easter that “you have been with JESUS.”

And so again with the hard sayings of the Gospels. If you have not read *Pastor Pastorum*,¹ read it, and see how CHRIST taught the future teachers of the world, and you will find He taught them by hard sayings. He did not spare St. John any more than the rest; some of the hardest sayings are recorded in his Gospel: “Except a man be born of water and of the SPIRIT, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.”

But what did St. John do?

He solved them by spiritual sympathy; he laid them up in his heart; he believed that there was an explanation, and that time would show it—and time did show it. “Go ye . . . and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST,” explained the one; “Take, eat: this

¹ *Pastor Pastorum*, Rev. H. Latham.

St. John

is My body; drink this: this is My blood," explained the other.

Ponder them all in your heart, then, if you are one of CHRIST's friends; turn them over, think over them, pray over them—He says them to make you think; and when He says, further, to try you, "Will ye also go away?" answer with the friends of old, "LORD, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Lastly, St. John was tried by long waiting. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" CHRIST had said, but the brave old man will not accept the interpretation put on the saying by the Church, that he was not to die; but he just repeats the exact words in the Gospel, which he must have repeated often to himself on the rock of Patmos, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

And he did tarry on, year after year, and no Great Friend came back; for all his looking, no Easter morning brightened with a more than earthly glory, to welcome the One whom he had once seen in shining garments, so that no fuller on earth could whiten them. No! instead, darkness came, and weakness, and at last death; but

St. John

he was faithful unto death—and he rested his head again on JESUS' breast in Paradise.

“Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”—so the doubter cries out still, but the friends of JESUS know better; they know whom they have believed, and are persuaded He is able to keep that which they have trusted to Him against that day; they know that “He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

And so we go back to-day to seek for the mingled strength and tenderness of the “disciple whom JESUS loved”; we go back to stand by His Cross against the world, at whatever risk of ridicule or loss; we go back to be trained, to be taught, and to wait. He still rebukes us if we go wrong—thank God He does; He still leaves much unexplained—He does it on purpose: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” He still leaves us to wait—till friends die, and we are left, still waiting, alone in exile. GOD grant we may so wait, faithful unto death, that, like St. John, we may meet our Friend in Paradise.

III

MARY OF BETHANY

*"She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint
My body to the burying."*—ST. MARK xiv. 8.

AMONG all the friendships of JESUS, there are none surrounded by so many touching incidents as His friendship with the family of three at Bethany. "Now JESUS loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"—that is the simple record, and yet of what priceless value has it been in the history of the world!

It is not too much to say that the picture of this little home, with all the purity, and love, and peace within it, has revolutionised the world; and it is possible that it comes with special force to a congregation like this, because it was a well-to-do home. Martha, to whom the house belonged, was evidently a woman of distinction in the place; Mary could afford the most costly ointment; and it was evidently a great concourse of the whole neighbourhood, drawing even from Jerusalem,

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which assembled to mourn with the sisters over the loss of their brother.

There are plenty of instances of CHRIST's love and tenderness to the very poor, so much so that I think sometimes the well-to-do have a sense of being left a little out in the cold from the central warmth of the Gospel, and it ought therefore to be of peculiar interest to those who are not of the very poor to notice CHRIST's love and friendship for Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus.

And if, out of the three, we single Mary, it is only because more is told us about her, and it is easier therefore to watch her moving before us, as we watched St. John, another disciple—and this time a woman—whom Jesus loved.

She comes before us in three chief scenes.

(1.) First in the well-known scene on the occasion, in all probability, of Jesus' first visit to their house. They had heard of this great Teacher, and, as was not uncommon in the East, had asked Him to stay at their house. Both were full of hospitality, both had helped to prepare for Him: but Martha was fussing over her preparation; Mary, whose instinct told her more truly what was the best entertainment He desired, sat at His feet, and listened to the wonderful words which

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proceeded from His mouth—"Never man spake like this man." You may be sure Mary was not selfish or inconsiderate. If she had been, CHRIST would have never said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." The repetition of the Christian name shows that, while the words were an encouragement to Mary, yet they were meant as the gentlest possible rebuke to Martha.

(2.) The next scene is the death of Lazarus: "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." We all know the touching story, the oft-repeated cry for the far-off Friend—"If He were only here, our brother would not die;" the anxious watching by the sick-bed, as some of us have watched, hoping against hope, listening for the Great Physician who never came; the gradual sinking of Lazarus till the last breath was drawn, and then the added misery of the almost instantaneous burial, and then three days of weeping and mourning, made more miserable, one would think by the crowds of mourners. But at last the great Friend comes back, and hope returns—"I know that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt

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ask of GOD, GOD will give it Thee;" and after hope the most glorious sunrise of certainty—"Lazarus, come forth"—and their three days' grief was proved to be but a small price to pay for a world redeemed for ever from the tyranny of death.

(3.) And then, thirdly, comes this most touching scene of all: it was growing towards the end, the shadow of the Cross was already falling on the Master, the burying was already in sight, the enemy was more hostile than ever, but Bethany was true: it was a kind of public feast given in His honour, and Mary with her precious gift all ready to do her part in the honour, brake the box, and poured some on His head, and anointed His feet with it, and wiped them with her hair. It was an Eastern act, but symbolical of an eternal sentiment: it meant devotion, and worship, and adoration of One who had deepened her spiritual life, restored her brother, and honoured her with the tender friendship of a Friend.

What stand out, then, as the striking features in this beautiful and touching story?

(1.) The extraordinary lift which it gave for ever to the position of women in the world.

We are so accustomed now to a chivalrous

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reverence for women, we are so accustomed to look on them as the equals and friends of men, that we are apt to ignore the fact that women owe the position which they hold to-day entirely to JESUS CHRIST Himself.

They had no such position in pre-Christian times. Read Tacitus, read or rather don't read Juvenal, and you will find that woman was the chattel and slave of man. They have no such position in the countries ruled by the religion of Mahomet, nor in India. I know few things more sickening to read than the treatment of young widows in India, and no greater claim exists to-day than the claim of these young widows, my sisters, on your prayers and help.

No! the holy friendship, so tender and so pure, between Jesus and Mary of Bethany, was a revelation to the world—more striking than any sermon, more effective than any words. It held up an ideal to the world of the true relation of the sexes: married or unmarried, woman was the friend, not the slave of man. This was the inspiration of chivalry; this was the beginning of all those noble deeds of knightly grace and gentle courtesies of which the Middle Ages are full; and it will go ill with us if, in our natural

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reaction from the prudery and affectation into which they degenerated, we fall back with our naturally freer manners into the vulgarity and coarseness of Rome.

(2.) Secondly, there comes out from the character of Mary the beauty of Innocence.

In days when many popular novels turn on some species of unfaithfulness, when it is so much more exciting to do rescue work than the more humdrum preventive work; in days when I have known even young men blush to admit that they had kept straight morally, we need a reminder of the priceless value of innocence, and that CHRIST's friend was a woman as pure as driven snow.

Some of you may have read a beautiful sermon by Mr. Illingworth, in his "University and Cathedral Sermons" on "Innocence." "Innocence," he says, "is not childish, but childlike; not the negative state of the untempted, but the confirmed, habitual state of those who have been brought through the fire; it is the grace of those who have loved GOD at first sight, and have never fallen away from their first love" (p. 103).

"They are in a special sense the generation of God's children. They go on their way light-

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ing every scene through which they pass—light of the world, salt of the earth, followers of the Lamb, their flesh a Sacrament, their voice a sermon, their glance a revelation of the spiritual world" (p. 113).

There may be some in this church who may be on the brink of losing their innocence of thought; they may be hesitating before plunging into some story which it is "the thing" to read, and which has all the dangerous fascination of a half-forbidden book.

My sister, why do it? Why defile the imagination, which is meant to reflect the face of CHRIST, as the angels in heaven always behold the face of their Father which is in heaven?

Curiosity made the first woman fall.

Why should you be ashamed of being innocent in thought? There are some of us who have in our work to wallow in crime, to see and hear every day, as we carry on the work of rescue, the most ghastly stories of disease and vice; but why should you? Why not keep up the standard of innocence in the world? Why not keep it as a beacon to which we may lift the others. Pray on, pity on, give freely; when GOD calls you, plunge down to the help of the vilest and the

Mary of Bethany

lowest ; but always remember your help must be by your own innocence : it is because they think you innocent that the others pray to you and look for help to you—

“ I beg of you, calm souls, whose wondering pity
Looks at paths you never trod ;
I beg of you who suffer, for all sorrow
Must be very near to GOD,
And the need is even greater than you see.
Pray for me.”

(3.) Thirdly, there comes out the acceptability of a worship and adoration which costs something to the giver. When Mary poured out this rich oblation, she was praised, not rebuked, by JESUS CHRIST. It is here that all questions of Sunday amusements come in. The question is often asked, Is it wrong to do this or that on Sunday ?

But, as a matter of fact, that is not the right way to ask the question. The Sabbath with its iron rules has gone for ever ; it has been superseded by a day which carries on into the Christian Church the two great principles¹ of rest and worship represented by the Sabbath.

All would admit that worship is due from the creature to the Creator ; all would go further,

¹ Cf. Dr. Liddon, “Easter Sermons,” vol. ii. Sermon xxiv., “The Lord’s Day.”

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and admit that if the Christian story is true, the friends of CHRIST should at least show as much devotion as did Mary of Bethany.

This brings us face to face with the question, How high a value am I going to put on the duty of worship, and how much am I going to allow it to cost me?

Mary looked about for the most costly thing she could find; and notice the spirit in which it is accepted. "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

In the light of this, let us look at such a question as Sunday morning golf. Where is the worship to come in? Is it important or unimportant? Is it to cost anything or nothing? Are we content to give it, if it is poked away at the end of the day, when it is no inconvenience? or are we perfectly satisfied, if, except when it rains, it is left out altogether?

What we ought to ask ourselves is this, "At what price do I price my offering?" Can we honestly say that we are asking, with David,

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“Shall I make an offering unto the LORD my GOD of that which has cost me nothing?” Can we honestly say that we are bringing an offering to CHRIST exceeding costly, as Mary did; and if it costs us nothing, can we suppose that it is of any value to Him at all?

That is the real question. It is no question of a rigid Sabbatarianism; it is no question of a return to the rigid Puritanism of our ancestors, when Sunday was a day of gloom. It is a day of happiness and a day of rest, but it is also a day of worship, a weekly commemoration of the Resurrection, and the friends of CHRIST are at the tomb early with their gifts.

What, then, come to be the Lenten lessons which spring from the character of Mary of Bethany?

Three lessons spring from the three scenes in which she appears.

(1.) That the true attitude of man and woman, old and young, is to be at the feet of JESUS: we are all learners; our only task as disciples is to interpret the will of CHRIST; we are with CHRIST in the school of prayer—it is at His feet that we learn to do our daily work.

Let us place ourselves there in thought through

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these quiet weeks. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." We go apart to be with JESUS.

(2.) We learn faith through trouble.

"He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Alas! how often He seems to do so now; how often the beloved child droops, and sinks, and dies, and no Good Physician comes, and how trying to the faith is the apparent slight and carelessness of our Friend!

But JESUS loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus through it all; He had a better thing in store, and He tried the faith of His friends, to strengthen and reward it.

So—though your reward day is not yet—hold on through the dark; the "two days" have lengthened out, but CHRIST has not forgotten, and some day He will join, if not on earth, the mother to her son, and the son to his mother, in Paradise.

(3.) Sacrifice is part of love.

GOD so loved the world that He gave His SON; the SON so loved the world that He gave Himself—"This have I done for thee: what hast thou done for Me?"

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Let us be clear. There is no love if there is no sacrifice: love means self-sacrifice. May there be such sacrifice in the return we make for Calvary, that JESUS may say of the efforts of His friends to-day, as of His friend of old, "They have wrought a good work on Me;" "She hath done what she could"!

IV

SIMON PETER

"The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."—ST. LUKE xxii. 61.

[T may almost be a relief to some of us to turn from the impregnable strength of a St. John and the snowy purity of Mary to the apparently more human and obviously more imperfect character of Simon Peter.

And yet it is very easy to underrate his character; it is very easy for us to adopt a superior kind of air, and criticise him as if we should have done so very much better in his place.

I. Let us first then look at his virtues. What did Jesus have in Peter which made Him undoubtedly love him very much, trust him very much, and allow him constantly to be the leader and spokesman of the rest?

(a) He had first a man of undoubted personal loyalty. No one can read the story without seeing that Peter, with all the imperfection of his service, loved Jesus with all his heart.

That first morning began it, when Andrew first

Simon . Peter

brought him to JESUS ; it was continued after the personal call, when he sank down at JESUS' knees in the boat and said, "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O LORD." And every day that passed, with its wondrous words, and its deeds of love, bound his honest heart closer to his Master.

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?"

"Yea, Lord: Thou knowest that I love Thee."

He did know it.

(b) So, secondly, He had in him a friend of undoubted courage. It is not every one who would have leaped out of the boat into deep water to reach his Master ; it is not every one who, when surrounded by an armed mob, would have unsheathed his sword, and faced them single-handed—and terrible as the failure was in the palace of the high-priest, it was like Peter's courage to be there at all : it was better than flying to his home, and bolting the door behind him, and leaving his Master to His fate.

(c) And so again, JESUS had in this friend of His a quick and apt pupil.

The absurd attempts of the Roman Church to read into Scripture the historical errors of later centuries must not blind us to the eulogy passed on St. Peter as the representative of those who

Simon Peter

have at last learnt the truth: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My FATHER which is in heaven." When a little group of friends at last believed that He was the CHRIST, the SON of GOD, then He could build; He could erect on this sure foundation what He could not on the shifting multitude.¹ "On this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

II. Are we quite sure, before we go on to think of St. Peter's faults, that we have his virtues?

(a) Have we got that touching sense of personal devotion? Is our sense of His Presence real enough to send us to our knees with a sense of sin such as sent St. Peter to his knees with the cry, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O LORD"? "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?"—could we answer back with humble sincerity, "Yea, LORD; Thou knowest that I love Thee"?

¹ See Canon Scott Holland, "Creed and Character," Sermon "The Rock of the Church."

Simon Peter

(b) Or, again, take his courage—"rash, impulsive, impetuous man, never stops to think, flings himself into the water, tries an impossible defence, puts himself into danger unnecessarily!" Yes! that is all very well, but could not CHRIST afford to exchange a few of his very cautious and calculating friends who risk nothing, dare nothing; who make no mistakes, but who make nothing else, for a few more warm-hearted, if blundering friends; who may do the wrong thing at the wrong time, but at any rate have the courage of their convictions, and are absolutely honest and selfless in their love?

(c) Or, again, are we apt pupils?

How much time—to put it no higher than that—how much time in the week do we devote to the culture of our Christian faith, to the learning of it, to the deepening of it? The real reason so many are so lukewarm is still due to the fact that there is no time for meditation, no time for reading such a book as the "Daily Round" on their knees: five minutes is considered enough in the morning for a hurried prayer, and the subject after breakfast is banished from their minds altogether.

III. But it is time to face the sad question

Simon Peter

why a man who had all this could have failed as St. Peter did, at the crucial point.

(a) First, no doubt, from his besetting sin of self-confidence. No one can help seeing that this was coming up again and again in St. Peter's character—that there was an egotism tainting even his very expressions of devotion—"I, I, I,"—it is always "I": "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death." The very forwardness in scene after scene is partly, at any rate, a putting of himself forward: "This be it far from Thee, LORD," he takes on himself to say. He just lacks the subtle reverence of St. John, even at the sepulchre. St. John will only look in, but St. Peter has no fear that he may not go anywhere, and rushes inside.

(b) And side by side with that, as always happens, went his dread of adverse criticism. The more the ego is developed, the more sensitive it is—the more irritable does it become under the slightest jeer or laughter. Many a man who would face a battery unarmed cannot stand a laugh, and is beside himself at a covert innuendo, especially if uttered by a woman.

And so Simon Peter, who was quite brave in the presence of the armed mob, could not stand

Simon Peter

being "made a fool of" by a servant girl: it was so humiliating for the leader of the Apostolic band, the rock Apostle, to be the butt and laughing-stock of the whole kitchen; and out comes the fatal denial, and then the oath to follow it, because he knew that he was wrong.

(c) And so, from his self-confidence, the brave man became a coward; forward and energetic as he had been with the others, he was proved to be incapable of standing alone.

He would not believe it when our LORD tried to warn him; he was quite certain that, with his warm feelings, everything was possible. No! "I will go with Thee unto prison and to death"—and he was right enough when in company, backed up by a public opinion in his favour; but when alone, in a cold, depressing atmosphere of hostility and suspicion, it was more than he could stand. "It will be the best policy to pretend I know nothing about it," he said to himself. "I will make up afterwards. He will quite understand my motives;" and then out loud, "I never knew the man."

At that moment the cock crew, with its long, grating, discordant, and insistent noise—"And the LORD turned, and looked upon Peter." It

Simon Peter

was quite enough: excuses, cowardice, shyness, self-confidence—that glance pierced through them all; the real Peter was smitten to the heart—“he went out, and wept bitterly.”

IV. Now, the advantage of St. Peter's story is that it preaches itself.

(a) Few of us have to look far for the fault of egotism. It may not show itself in boastful words—we may have too much good taste for that; but few are unaware of the desire for praise, for admiration, for personal distinction, which corrodes the service of even good men and women.

What is at this moment the growing motive of your life, your most dominant wish? What is the figure which rises most often before the horizon of your mind? Is it not the image of yourself, rich, or famous, or universally popular? Then beware, lest, in your very expressions of devotion to CHRIST, you are really worshipping yourself, and lest your very philanthropy and “work for God” is feeding your vanity and self-conceit.

(b) Again, does not this same self-love often make us very sensitive as to what people say? “To be made to look foolish” is the undefined

Simon Peter

horror of half the world; and I am not saying we ought to want to look foolish: there is a perfectly natural self-respect, and it is a true instinct to desire the praise of good men and women, for their approval is the shadow of the approval of GOD; but to be so afraid of looking foolish that we trifle with our most cherished convictions—to be so afraid of the opinion of our set, that we dare not openly say out what we think—that is to run dangerously near denying CHRIST, like St. Peter.

(c) And notice, thirdly, it unfits us to stand alone. Ultimately, no disciple is considered tested till he stands alone. One by one we are born; one by one we die; one by one we are judged. The battle depends on each soldier of the Cross standing firm where he is placed.

When you were last left alone in an uncongenial atmosphere, among those who did not believe as you did, did you stand there as quiet and unmoved as St. John, or did you fail as St. Peter?

We cannot answer these questions for one another, but there is One who can: the LORD knows. The LORD turns and looks on us to-day as He did on St. Peter; He knows; and if

Simon Peter

we ask the HOLY SPIRIT to bring home to us the truth, He will take of CHRIST, and show Him to us; His look will break through all conventionality and lying excuses, and show us what we are; it will pierce through egotism and love of popularity and cowardice, and show us ourselves, not as others see us, but as CHRIST sees us.

It has been well said that there is only one question more important than "What do I think of CHRIST?" and that is, "What does CHRIST think of me?" Perhaps some of us, if we knew the answer, would go out and weep bitterly!

V. But there is just time, before we separate, to look for our comfort at the beautiful finish of the story. Those tears of penitence were not the end, they were the beginning; they were the end of the old Peter, and the beginning of the new; there arose from that Lenten penitence a new man, humbled, steadfast, faithful unto death.

Notice—

(1.) How humbly he answers back when CHRIST in His mercy gave him his second trust: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" He asserts nothing, boasts nothing; he uses the less strong word for love in his reply than his LORD had used, "Thou knowest that I love Thee"—and

Simon Peter

the humble Peter receives a charge for which the self-confident one was not fit, "Feed My sheep," "Feed My lambs."

(2.) Notice, secondly, the power he became when he was trained at last to trust to the HOLY SPIRIT and not to himself. He converted three thousand in his first sermon, and the very shadow of Peter passing by healed the sick.

(3.) Notice the unflinching courage with which he went alone to death, and was crucified, if we may trust to tradition, with his head downwards—thus fulfilling his LORD's prophecy, "When thou shalt be old, another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." It gives us a hope that it is not too late for any of us to pass from egotistical, weak, and undecided disciples into humble and decided men of GOD. CHRIST still takes trouble with His friends; He still prays for them by name, as He did for Simon; He still longs to use them in His service; there are still sheep to be folded, and lambs to be taught, but it must all begin with the searching look that reveals the heart.

"Oh, oft forsaken, oft denied,
Forgive our shame, wash out our sin;
Look on us from Thy FATHER'S side,
And let that sweet look win."

V

MARY MAGDALENE

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."—ST. LUKE vii. 47.

IT might be thought that in taking this text for our meditation on the character of Mary Magdalene, we were falling into the common error of identifying Mary Magdalene with this woman who was a sinner. Here, in this passage from which the text is taken, comes before us the touching story of the woman who crept out of the streets into the house of the proud Pharisee, wept tears of penitence over the feet of JESUS, and then, half-ashamed of having done wrong, wiped them with her hair, received CHRIST's gracious message of forgiveness, and went back, as He told her, "into peace."

But because in the next chapter Mary Magdalene is mentioned, as one out of whom our LORD had cast seven devils, it has become a popular tradition, in the teeth of every responsible commentator, without the smallest shred of evi-

Mary Magdalene

dence that this woman who was a sinner was Mary Magdalene herself.

But though this is absolutely true, and we must prefer truth at any price, at the expense of any preconceived ideas or natural desire to give a finish to Bible incidents which they do not possess, yet it is perfectly true that the two incidents of the forgiveness of this poor penitent, and the casting of seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, blend in a very beautiful and instructive way.

(1.) Think first from what Mary of Magdala had been saved. We have many pictures in the New Testament of this mysterious malady which is called "possession by devils"; we can never get out of our minds that wild-looking half-naked figure, cutting himself with stones, with a kind of double personality, now speaking in the name of a man, and now in that of a legion of devils, whom our LORD met on the other side of the Lake of Gennesareth; we hear in this very Gospel of a man who had "the spirit of an unclean devil"; and the lunatic boy who kept throwing himself into the fire and into the water, forms, in a certain famous picture, the great foil to the peace of the Transfiguration itself.

We are at liberty then to picture all or any

Mary Magdalene

of these symptoms in Mary of Magdala, for it is said that "out of her had departed seven devils." If we roll these pictures into one, and think back this loving, affectionate, faithful friend into her hopeless and outcast condition, we have no need to invent new stories about her to account for her love and devotion to her LORD.

(2.) And so again, when we group the two stories together, and ask ourselves practically what we are going to learn from them ourselves, this casting out of devils is, for all intents and purposes, the loosening of the bonds of sin. That uncontrolled temper, that overmastering egotism, that tyrannical fear of what the world will say, that clinging sloth, that secret impurity, that habitual insincerity, that inordinate vanity—what are they but the sevenfold devils that JESUS must cast out of Mary again to-day? what are they at the same time but the sins—"the many ones"—which He forgave the woman who was a sinner?

(3.) And above all, as a foil to the double picture, to Mary Magdalene as well as to the woman who was a sinner, sits Simon the Pharisee with his intellectual forehead, his robes of snowy respectability, his polite but distant manner; entertaining CHRIST, but not too well; receiving

Mary Magdalene

Him as the custom was to receive great Rabbis, but with no kiss of welcome, no water for His feet, no ointment for His head; hating sentiment, hating sensationalism, half afraid, even before, that he was getting mixed up with something not quite proper, and quite sure about it now that a woman who was a sinner was allowed to wash His feet with her tears, and wipe them with her hair. "He to whom little is being forgiven, the same loveth little."

My friends, it would be an interesting question, and one to which GOD alone knows the full answer, Which of these two pictures most closely resembles ourselves? CHRIST is still testing us by His Presence in our midst; have we the forgiven reverence of the two women, or the conscious but self-complacent rectitude of Simon? Are we saying in our hearts, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are"?

I. Let us take the modern Simon first. Let us acknowledge that there is a great deal to be said for him: he goes up to the city or to the law courts every day, and he is quite incorruptible in matters of money at a time when many go wrong; again, in days when loose literature is scattered broadcast, he never allows it to lie about

Mary Magdalene

his house. He discourages bad language in his club, and while others adopt lax notions about Sunday, he comes regularly to Church, at any rate on Sunday morning ; let us recognise that all this is excellent, it answers exactly to what Simon the Pharisee did in his day.

But where did the original Simon break down ? What did he have about him which prevented him, while it remained, rising to be a friend of CHRIST'S ?

(a) He was perfectly self-satisfied ; he had little or no sense of sin ; he felt that it was rather kind of him to patronise this wandering Teacher at all ; he was wrapt in a sense of his own integrity, and blinded by a consciousness of his own importance.

(b) This led him to a secret contempt for enthusiasm, and horror instead of pity for the woman that was a sinner ; he utterly failed to understand the overmastering love which did not wrap itself in its own integrity, but went out to seek and to save that which was lost.

(c) And so, he loved little ; he was good to a certain point, but he did not go far enough ; he needed conviction of sin as much as the outcast and the sinner ; he needed his heart to be smitten

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with the Cross, as Moses smote the rock, that streams of love and pity might flow forth; he needed ringing in his ears the scathing rebuke, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and then he would have fallen at JESUS' feet—and, for aught we know, he may at last have fallen at JESUS' feet—with the cry, "GOD, be merciful to me, a sinner;" he would have known that much was being forgiven him, and he would have loved much.

It may be that some here have a great difficulty in realising that they are sinners; they feel that, whether they are men or women, Simon the Pharisee not inaptly represents them. If that is so, let us be sure that JESUS gives us the same chance He gave Simon; He does not spare the rebuke if it may soften the heart, and there are three things we must do.

(1.) We must remember that it is by the mercy of CHRIST that we are saved from being what we might have been. "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of GOD," said a good man when he saw a criminal being led to execution. We are too apt to take the credit to ourselves for

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our circumstances. Imagine that you were born of poor parents out of work in Whitechapel, and had to pick up your living in the docks, or that you were a working girl in Bethnal Green, trying to keep your poor parents or nurse a sick brother out of making match-boxes at 2½d. a gross, and then thank GOD you were spared the temptation to a bad life, which they have to undergo.

(2.) So, again, we must remember that sins of the spirit are quite as bad in the eyes of CHRIST as sins of the flesh; He never spoke a hard word of the publican and sinner, but He lashed with His scorn the "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." The sins that we respectable people commit lightly every day, of pride and indolence and indifference to the sufferings of the poor, may be worse in His sight than the most flagrant sins of those who know no better.

(3.) And, thirdly, we must remember that there are not two Gospels, one for the rich and the other for the poor, but one for rich and poor alike, and that only one narrow path leads to salvation, and that is the narrow path which winds under the Cross. Let us get well within view of the Cross this coming holy week; let us ask the HOLY SPIRIT to bring home to us the Cross;

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let us say to ourselves, "It was my pride, conceit, and sloth that helped to nail Him to the tree;" let us pray for the spirit of grace and supplication, that "we may mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son," and, please GOD, we shall know that much is being forgiven us, and we shall love much.

II. Let us then turn in contrast to Mary Magdalene. Mysterious and unknown as her past was, except for the casting out of the seven devils, there is no doubt that the debt she felt she owed her LORD was immense; she felt, like the woman in the story, that much had been forgiven, and she loved much. You see her with the other women ministering of her substance; she stood by the Cross; she was doubtless one of those who helped to lay His body in the tomb; and she was the first at the grave on Easter morning.

Now, what does all this mean to us?

(1.) It means, first, that the sense of sin is not morbid. It is too often thought to be so. "Don't think about the past, be happy and forget," the world says, but it is the one fatal step—no one is really happy till they have faced their past; but when they have, they remember it as sin forgiven; the stream which has flowed up to absolution as repentance flows on under the life evermore as

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contrition. Mary thought that "much was being forgiven," but she lived an active life of loving ministry.

It is a puzzle to some why the Prayer Book services are so full of expressions of penitence. How can we say that "the burden of our sins is intolerable" when we have laid them at the feet of CHRIST? Why do we pray so constantly for contrite hearts? Why, even in the grand *Gloria in Excelsis*, do we sink on our knees, saying, "Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us"? The Prayer Book is written for forgiven men and women, why then this note of sorrow?

And the answer is simply this—

Contrition is sorrow for forgiven sin: we look back on it, we remember it, but as sin forgiven; it keeps us humble, it keeps us low at the feet of CHRIST; but it sends us on our way to works of greater love, because "much has been forgiven."

(2.) The love which springs from forgiveness does not rest in mere sentiment. No one can doubt the tender love Mary bore her LORD. "Let me kiss the hand," she says in the beautiful play at Ober-Ammergau, at the entombment, "let me kiss the hand that has so often blessed me;" and in the Bible narrative is anything more life-

Mary Magdalene

like and touching than her distress when she found the body gone—a distress which blinded her to the sudden presence of her LORD? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus saith unto her, “Mary.” She turned herself, and saith unto Him, “Rabboni.” But still her love all through was extremely practical—she ministered of her substance; she prepared sweet spices and ointment. “Who shall roll us away the stone?” she asks. So to-day it is hard to believe in the love of any of CHRIST’s friends if they are not, to the limit of their capacity, helping on the work of His Church and ministering of their substance to the poor and needy, of whom He Himself said, “Inasmuch as ye do it to the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto Me.”

(3.) Mary’s love was self-forgetting.

How easy it is to be selfish in showing love and devotion to those we love! how disgraced the Church has been, and often is to-day, by jealousy between Church workers, between those who are supposed to be working in harmony in the Christian cause! but you hear nothing of this among the group of women who followed our LORD.

Mary Magdalene

There was a strife among some of the disciples as to which should be accounted the greatest, but there is no trace among these women of any jealousy or rivalry at all. The love which springs from a sense of forgiveness is generally unselfish: it bears with others, it knows its own faults, it is that charity that covers a multitude of sins.

And so we go back with a very definite lesson from this fourth friend of CHRIST's. We have got it partly by a powerful contrast which draws out the truth. We go back to ask to be saved from the self-sufficiency of Simon the Pharisee; we go back to ask to be gifted with the forgiven love of Mary Magdalene.

And all depends upon our attitude to CHRIST Himself. He is in the midst of us as of old, exactly the same, with His lofty standard, but His ready forgiveness, watching us, reading us, judging us. Let Simon catch the spirit of Mary Magdalene—humble, devoted, self-forgetting—thankful to be allowed to do his Master the slightest service, and abased at the sense of his own unworthiness, and let him add to his high-mindedness and rectitude the one transforming touch he needs—the grace of contrition, humility and love, and he will become himself a “disciple whom JESUS loves”—a friend of CHRIST's.

VI

ST. THOMAS

"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."—ST. JOHN xi 16

THOMAS was what we should call in these days a pessimist; he took habitually the dark side of things: when others thought there might be some danger, Thomas was quite certain the scheme was desperate. There was some risk, no doubt, in returning to Judæa: Thomas was confident that it was certain death.

And combined with this bent of mind was a very cautious intellect: he never went an inch beyond his evidence. One of the few times he speaks in the Gospels is to ask for an explanation. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know," CHRIST had said. Thomas asks at once, "LORD, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" and so it is only what we should expect, that when others were enthusiastic at the appearance of their Risen LORD, Thomas should have been the one to doubt. He would

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like to believe it, but it was too good to be true. "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

But still in and through his slowness and cautiousness and pessimism, Thomas was as loyal and true a friend as CHRIST had among them all. He might think his Master mistaken in going to Judæa, but he would die with Him for all that. No one would have felt keener anguish at His death than Thomas, and it was probably the intense longing to see his Master again that made him afraid to believe in the Resurrection, until it was demonstrated to his eyes; and so there is a peculiar delight in watching the scene with which St. John originally meant to close his Gospel, in which the reserved and cautious man falls at last at JESUS' feet, with the half-penitent, half-joyful cry, "My LORD and my God."

(1.) And the first thing which stands out high and clear as a beacon of hope for all time is this that one of CHRIST's friends was a doubter.

If it had not been for this, we might have been carried away by the popular idea that doubt in itself is wicked, and that instead of bravely facing

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doubts, and laying the spectres of the mind, we were meant to stifle the free play of our reason, and, as people say, "just believe."

Many a young man and young woman pass through a stage of doubt at certain times in their lives, and a great deal depends upon how that doubt is treated. If it is treated as sinful in itself, it often lands the doubter in deeper scepticism, and perhaps throws him into permanent alienation from the Faith.

There may be some of you who are at this moment feeling desperately wicked because you have lurking in your minds doubts and difficulties about the faith. Bring them out, and look them in the face: your time of doubt is meant as a transition stage, from a child's to a man's or woman's faith. You do not cease to be a friend of CHRIST's because you doubt; He understands all about it as He did of old: you are just waking up to the tremendous thing you say you believe when you believe Christianity; you have never thought about it before, and He knows better than you that the doubt will be succeeded in His own good time by a faith which shall make you cry with your intellect as well as with your heart, "My LORD and my GOD."

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(2.) But to safeguard this, we must notice, secondly, that Thomas, to use a phrase of Plato's, "doubted well."

(a) He realised what was involved in his doubts: there was not a grain of affectation about him. He was not like the dilettante doubters we sometimes meet to-day, who brush the whole thing lightly aside with the superior air of those who have outlived old-fashioned superstitions; he was in dead earnest. He knew perfectly well that if this Sun set no other sun was likely to rise; he knew perfectly well that if this Man failed him he would never have the heart to trust another; and he was quite aware in his grim and silent way that what he doubted was life or death, not only to himself but to a dying world.

And so the first sign of a good doubter is to realise what he is doing. Doubt does not lose CHRIST's friendship, but flippancy, conceit, and levity undoubtedly do. Think what they were to Him, oppressed in Gethsemane with the world's woes. There is only one attitude in which it is possible to reject Christianity, if we must reject it, and that is the sad and respectful attitude of one who believes that the one light which

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has ever lighted up the darkness of the world is quenched for ever.

(b) And then, again, Thomas doubted well because he was loyal, not only to CHRIST but to the Church. He was found with all the rest of the disciples, in spite of his doubt, at the Easter octave: he was not one of those who at the first difficulty fling off their old friends, throw over their Communions, and turn their back on the Church. He had a steadier judgment; he knew there must be difficulties in religion, and painful as they were, the place where he would be most likely to have them solved would be where he had received so much help and light before; and because he kept with the Church JESUS found His friend in his old place when He came to help him.

I know that it is often from a desire to be honest, but surely it is from a mistaken idea of what is right, that those brought up as Christians in the Church, at the first touch of doubt should throw over with desperate haste all that they once held sacred. Would they do it with any other friend? Are the years of faithful kindness they have received in their girlhood or boyhood to count as nothing? Is this one little doubt to

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cancel the love and trust of twenty years? Rather let them stay where Thomas did, with his old friends, in the old place; let them pray on for light, and look for the morning. Would Thomas ever have forgiven himself if CHRIST had come a second time and found him away?

(c) And that brings us on to the third point about the good doubter—he wants light.

There is a way of seeking for truth which does not want to find it. “What can be better than seeking for Truth?” asked a Secularist lecturer the other day, in an airy way. “Why, finding it,” was the obvious retort; and we may all take whether we think so as the true test of good or bad doubt.

If you cannot honestly say that you care much whether you find Truth or not, if you rather enjoy the distinction of being looked on as bold freethinkers, and take a pleasure in saying smart things irrespective of their truth, then you may be perfectly certain that nothing will be revealed to you: you are not worthy of being told it; you are in the shallow, frivolous, vain state of mind, incapable of understanding the deep things of God; but if, on the other hand, you long for Truth, if the deep longing of your heart is to

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see CHRIST again, as it was the deepest longing of Thomas, and to be sure that "the Great Companion is not dead," then the things hid from the worldly wise and prudent will be revealed to you, and if not in this world, at least in the world to come you will fall at His feet with the cry, "My LORD and my GOD."

(3.) For notice, thirdly, if the doubter doubts well—CHRIST is prepared to offer proofs. He cannot offer us again the ocular demonstration which He offered Thomas—"Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side." He will not offer mathematical proofs, for spiritual things are spiritually discerned; but He brings us proofs for all that.

(a) There is nothing wrong with the documents which He puts into our hands—they have been tested again and again, and subjected to the fiercest light, but they have come out more clearly to-day than ever. Such and such persons of such and such character at such and such a date bore this witness to what they had seen; more than 250 asserted they had themselves seen CHRIST when St. Paul lived and wrote, and all the apostles died for their faith. Besides this, Tacitus and Suetonius mention JESUS CHRIST

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themselves, the former saying He was put to death under Pontius Pilate.

(b) But we are not dependent solely on the documents. What originated this extraordinary fact in history called the Christian Church? It is here, whether we like it or hate it, the most wonderful and powerful thing in the world to-day. It contains within its fold the most progressive nations of the world, and goes on conquering and to conquer.

What started it?

The sight of a dead peasant on the cross, who had disappointed the few followers he had, and proved himself an impostor in his monstrous claims? Impossible! You may be certain that if the last that was seen of CHRIST was on the Cross of Calvary, then it would have been the last that would have been seen of the Christian Church. CHRIST had overreached Himself if He had meant to be the Founder of a merely human society; He claimed too much to be the founder of another Buddhism. The Buddha had never claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life, and therefore there was no disappointment when he died; but the Christian disciples were, many of them, dropping off, like the disciples at Emmaus: "We trusted

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that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel;" and they were going away sad and disheartened, and we may be sure that nothing could have filled them with new life, and sent the Church on its way singing, but the appearance of their Risen LORD, full of life and full of power.

(c) And so again with Sunday. How did a body of Jews, conservative beyond all others, conservative most about their holy days, change their holy day from Saturday to Sunday? Why not to Friday, if it was to commemorate their Master's death? There is no explanation, and there never has been any explanation, except that something happened on the Sunday, so extraordinary and so transcendent, as to throw every other day entirely into the shade.

(d) And so again, what became of the LORD's body? Only two sets of people could have had it—the disciples or the Jews. If the disciples had it, then they must have hidden it and proclaimed a lie, which every critic in the world declares to be impossible. If the Jews had it, why did they not produce it and confound the story of the disciples? If neither had it, what else can we think but that it was the same body, glorified and transfigured.

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which convinced even Thomas of its reality, and was seen by five hundred people in broad daylight on a mountain?

Yes! CHRIST brings us His proofs; He will not strain our friendship too far; but even as we ask for them and take them He adds the strongest proof of all when He says, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" Is it likely that I, your Friend, would have claimed to be something I was not? Is it likely that I should claim to be the Resurrection and the Life, and yet not rise again Myself? "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side;" but still for all that "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

(4.) But what has Thomas still to say, and what does he say to-day?

(a) First—and let religious people take note of it—he says that "Christians are so inconsistent; that this belief ought to mean so much and does mean so little; that Christians are just as uncharitable, just as apt to use sharp practice, just as hard at a bargain as other people"; and there is no doubt about it, that the greatest argument against Christianity is a bad Christian. "There goes the

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founder of our Infidel Club," said a young man to the late Professor Drummond. "Why! that is the leading elder in such and such a church." "Yes! and he is known to be the greatest hypocrite in the town: that is why we are all secularists."¹

But, if there is a man here to-day who feels like that, I would ask him, Is it fair to judge Christianity by the worst, instead of by the best, or even by the average? Think of some true friend, perhaps sitting by your side, to whom you owe more than you will be able to repay; see in her or in him what CHRIST can do, when He has a pure and obedient soul to work on by His grace.

(b) "He can't be wrong whose life is in the right." Yes! but is his life in the right? and if it is, does he imagine he owes nothing to the great ideals and lofty standards produced in Europe by eighteen centuries of Christianity? Why, there are men to-day disowning CHRIST, who owe CHRIST all they are and all they have. Who made common property in the world the idea of a loving Father? Who substituted the ideal of a self-sacrificing man, instead of the old

¹ "In Relief of Doubt," Rev. R. E. Welsh.

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ideal of the "great souled man who was independent of the needs and wants of others," except the very Being whom they unconsciously follow, while they openly disown?

(c) Lastly, "a man is not responsible for his belief." But do you think that likely? Do you think it likely that the Great Sun should arise in the heavens, and man not have the power to see it? Would you believe it, if you were told it of the physical world?—then why should it be more likely of the spiritual? The soul has an eye like the body, only even more delicate and sensitive, and we are as responsible for seeing with the one as with the other.

Are there any here whose spiritual eyesight is weak and indistinct? Be sure that CHRIST, the Good Physician, knows if it is due to neglect of early training, to the atrophy of part of the eye, such as either the conscience, the imagination, or the reason; be sure that He will make allowances for faults in your education, for the bad influence of others; but He is too good a friend not to expect you to see. He wants to help you; He wants to close these Lenten meditations with a revelation: His last message is to Thomas. Bend again those stubborn knees in prayer; take out

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the neglected Bible; put aside your sceptical books, at any rate for a time, and be fair to your own mind; read the other side; pray for light; will to do the will of GOD, so far as it is at present revealed to you, and the eternal promise shall be true of you, as it has been of hundreds before, "He that wills to do the will of GOD shall know of the doctrine whether it be of GOD."

THE END







